

2667615

Registered provider: Mercia Children Services Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home is privately owned and operated. It provides care for up to four children who may be experiencing social and emotional difficulties. The provider states in its statement of purpose that care is provided for children aged from eight to 17 years.

A new manager is in post. She is not yet registered with Ofsted.

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 December 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of last inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
Not previously inspected		

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Children benefit from living in a large, warm and welcoming home environment. The home is decorated to a good standard and the children's bedrooms are personalised to reflect their individuality. However, the manager has not addressed risks highlighted by the fire risk assessment, and there is an unsecured laundry shaft which presents a potential risk of injury.

There are currently four children living in the home. Three children have made limited progress from their initial starting point. Staff offer support and guidance and try to engage children in positive activities. However, children are not provided with individualised care, structure or boundaries. Children are not being encouraged or challenged to make progress and meet their potential.

Not all children are receiving education. When children are not in formal education, staff do not robustly challenge other professionals and agencies to secure them an appropriate placement. Children are also not being offered a clear timetable of alternative learning. Staff do not have information regarding children's learning needs and goals. In addition, there is no system in place to monitor and measure children's progress. This limits children's achievements and development.

Children enjoy regular family time with people who are important to them. Staff work hard to get to know children's family members and to support the children's relationships in any way they can. This helps children to improve their family relationships and experience consistency.

Children struggle to develop positive relationships with the adults caring for them. Staff recognise that there is work to be done to build these relationships and are trying hard to find creative approaches to establish these bonds. However, children do not experience consistency from the adults around them, which has resulted in increased conflict and a lack of trust.

Children's plans are not sufficiently personalised to reflect their individual needs. Plans and assessments for when children move in and out of the home are poor. Children are not receiving care which consistently meets their needs.

Children's health needs are well managed. When children move into the home, staff ensure that they are quickly registered with local health services. Children are supported to attend all health appointments. Children's physical health is promoted.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children have been reported missing from home. Staff know and follow the agreed missing-from-home protocol. This means that there is a quick and coordinated response from all professionals to keep children safe.

There is inconsistency in the quality of recording when children go missing from home. Records do not evidence that children are offered an opportunity to reflect on their return home with an independent person. This is a missed opportunity for support and to identify any learning to prevent reoccurrence.

Staff support children to stay safe online. Staff monitor children's use of social media effectively. Children are also regularly given time to talk about safe and healthy relationships. This raises children's awareness of online risks and helps them to stay safe.

Leaders and managers regularly review and update risk assessments. Despite this, risk assessments are of poor quality. Assessments do not define and explain the risks that children are facing and do not set out the actions for staff to take in the event of an incident. As a result, staff are not provided with the information that they need to keep children safe.

Staff care about the children's well-being and want the best for them. However, sometimes, staff use language which places blame on children for the risks they are facing. This is unhelpful for children and will prevent them from developing closer relationships with staff.

Suitable background checks are carried out before any adults start working at the home. This ensures that children are not placed at risk from inappropriate adults caring for them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

Leaders and managers do not have effective oversight of children's plans, assessments and records. There are systems for monitoring and auditing in place; however, they have not been used effectively to identify and address issues. This has caused confusion for children around their plans and inconsistency in the provision of care.

Staff attend regular training courses. This provides them with the skills and knowledge to meet children's needs.

Leaders and managers communicate well with parents. They provide regular feedback on children's progress and discuss any issues without delay. Parents feel supported by the leadership team.

The manager regularly reviews and revises the home's statement of purpose. This document clearly sets out the aim of the home to be an inclusive environment. However, the language used does not include children who might identify outside of binary gender norms. The statement of purpose is therefore in conflict with the values of the provider.

Leaders and managers build good relationships with children's social workers and other important professionals. Professionals report that the leadership team communicates any issues quickly and keeps in touch regularly. This helps to promote effective partnership working.

Staff feel supported by their leaders and managers. However, the timescales for the regularity of supervision sessions are not included in the home's workforce development plan. Supervision sessions and the records of supervision sessions are of inconsistent quality, and some records are incomplete. This limits the effectiveness of management oversight of staff and opportunities for staff improvement.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The protection of children standard is that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child; have the skills to identify and act upon signs that a child is at risk of harm; understand the roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting children that are assigned to them by the registered person; take effective action whenever there is a serious concern about a child's welfare; and that the premises used for the purposes of the home are located so that children are effectively safeguarded. (Regulation 12 (1) (2)(a)(i)(iii)(v)(vi)(c)) Specifically, the registered person must ensure that all risk assessments clearly define and explain risks and provide staff with a clear guide for how to manage those risks. The registered person must address the risks highlighted by the fire risk assessment. The registered person must secure the laundry chute in the home to prevent injury.	28 February 2023

The positive relationships standard is that children are helped to develop, and to benefit from, relationships based on— mutual respect and trust; an understanding about acceptable behaviour; and positive responses to other children and adults. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— meet each child’s behavioural and emotional needs, as set out in the child’s relevant plans; strive to gain each child’s respect and trust; that each child is encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships with others. (Regulation 11 (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(i)(viii)(b)) In particular, the registered person must ensure that staff understand the particular needs of the children they are caring for and use that knowledge to build positive relationships with the children. The registered person must make sure that staff use positive and proportionate behaviour management techniques and are able to de-escalate conflict in the home.	28 February 2023
The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children’s home that— helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— understand the impact that the quality of care provided in the home is having on the progress and experiences of each child and use this understanding to inform the development of the quality of care provided in the home;	28 February 2023

use monitoring and review systems to make continuous improvements in the quality of care provided in the home. (Regulation 13 (1)(a)(b) (2)(f)(h)) In particular, the registered manager must have oversight of staff and the home which enables them to identify and address issues quickly.	
The education standard is that children make measurable progress towards achieving their educational potential and are helped to do so. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff— support each child’s learning and development, including helping the child to develop independent study skills and, where appropriate, helping the child to complete independent study; promote opportunities for each child to learn informally; help a child who is excluded from school, or who is of compulsory school age but not attending school, to access educational and training support throughout the period of exclusion or non-attendance and to return to school as soon as possible. (Regulation 8 (1) (2)(a)(ii)(v)(viii)) Specifically, the registered person must make sure that information about children’s learning needs and academic levels are on their files. Staff must understand each child’s individual learning needs and how best to support them. The registered manager must ensure that when children are not in formal education, they are provided with an alternative planned routine and structure of learning. The registered manager must also ensure that staff are robustly advocating on behalf of children who are out of education to challenge schools and local authorities to find them a suitable educational setting as soon as possible. The registered manager must also ensure that there is a way of clearly measuring the progress children are making.	28 February 2023

The enjoyment and achievement standard is that children take part in and benefit from a variety of activities that meet their needs and develop and reflect their creative, cultural, intellectual, physical and social interests and skills. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that staff help each child to— develop the child’s interests and hobbies; participate in activities that the child enjoys and which meet and expand the child’s interests and preferences; and make a positive contribution to the home and the wider community; and that each child has access to a range of activities that enable the child to pursue the child’s interests and hobbies. (Regulation 9 (1) (2)(a)(i)(ii)(iii)(b)) Specifically, the registered person must provide children with a structure and routine to their daily lives which encourages and challenges them to develop their interests and reach their potential.	28 February 2023
The care planning standard is that children— receive effectively planned care in or through the children’s home; and have a positive experience of arriving at or moving on from the home. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to ensure— that children are admitted to the home only if their needs are within the range of needs of children for whom it is intended that the home is to provide care and accommodation, as set out in the home’s statement of purpose. (Regulation 14 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)) Specifically, children’s plans, assessments and records must always be personalised to reflect their individual needs.	28 February 2023

In particular, transitions for children moving out of the home should be carefully planned in plenty of time to fully prepare the child.	
The quality and purpose of care standard is that children receive care from staff who— understand the children’s home’s overall aims and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for children; use this understanding to deliver care that meets children’s needs and supports them to fulfil their potential. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff— provide personalised care that meets each child’s needs, as recorded in the child’s relevant plans, taking account of the child’s background. (Regulation 6 (1)(a)(b) (2)(b)(iv)) In particular, the registered manager must make sure that staff understand children’s individual needs and are providing them with care which meets their own specific needs and goals.	28 February 2023

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that the statement of purpose uses inclusive language, particularly regarding gender identity, which reflects the home’s stated ethos. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, pages 14 and 15, paragraph 3.5)
- The registered person should have a workforce plan that details the process and timescales for supervision of practice. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 53, paragraph 10.8)
- The registered person should have systems in place so that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision in line with the timescales in the workforce development plan. Records of supervision should be completed in a timely manner and supervision actions and targets should be clearly recorded and reviewed. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, pages 14 and 15, paragraph 13.2)
- The registered person should ensure that staff record information about individual children in a non-stigmatising way. Language used in files should not place blame or judgement on a child. (‘Guide to the Children’s Homes Regulations, including the quality standards’, page 62, paragraph 14.4)

- The registered person should ensure that when a child returns after being missing from home, the responsible local authority provides an opportunity for the child to have an independent return home interview. The interview should be recorded and used as part of the manager's evaluation to reflect on. ('Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards', page 45, paragraph 9.3)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people, using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations, including the quality standards'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 2667615

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Mercia Children Services Limited

Registered provider address: Bramhall House, 14 Ack Lane East, Bramhall, Stockport, Cheshire SK7 2BY

Responsible individual: Michael Lloyd

Registered manager: Collette Gedman

Inspector

Nicola Shaw, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

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